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SUBJECT: (S/NF) JAPAN PLANS IRAQ WITHDRAWAL, EXPANDED
AFGHAN MISSION

Classified By: Ambassador J. Thomas Schieffer; Reasons: 1.4 (b/d)

11. (S/NF) Summary: The Japanese government is actively planning to terminate the C-130 support mission in Iraq by the end of the year while expanding its activities in Afghanistan, according to MOFA National Security Division Director Takeo Mori. Mori said that these decisions are driven by the political calendars in both Japan and the United States. While Japan is sending a team to NATO and Afghanistan to look at three different possible missions -- C-130 support in Afghanistan, participation in a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT), and dispatch of CH-47 heavy lift helicopters -- Mori said that only the C-130 mission and a token PRT may be politically sustainable in the current environment. Mori said that the CH-47 mission was added to the list mainly to mollify elements within the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and is considered a non-starter by the political leadership. Mori stated that the National Police Agency (NPA) will not support in-country training missions, adding that even participation by civilians in PRTs may be difficult given security concerns. Mori and his counterparts from MOD and the Cabinet Office agreed, however, that the survey team would assess possible missions beyond those currently under consideration. Mori said that, while he is "far from authorized" to share current internal thinking on the subject, it is important for the U.S. government to understand the parameters Tokyo is operating under as it plans a major shift in its Iraq/Afghan deployments. End Summary.

12. (S/NF) During a May 27 dinner hosted by the Embassy Pol-Mil Chief and DATT, MOFA National Security Division Director Takeo Mori provided a frank and detailed assessment of Japan's plans for Iraq and Afghanistan deployments. Mori, who was joined by MOD International Cooperation Division Director Masami Oka and Cabinet National Security Councilor Kenji Takahashi, stated that while he was "far from authorized" to discuss Japan's internal planning, he felt it was important for Washington to understand Japan's political constraints in order to manage expectations.

Delicate Political Balance

¶3. (S/NF) Mori stated that the government is navigating in extremely narrow political waters. While powerful figures in the Cabinet and Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) are still intent on enacting a Permanent Self-Defense Force (SDF) Dispatch Law, it is increasingly clear to officials that the junior coalition Komeito Party will not allow this to happen this year. During a recent meeting of the leadership of the LDP and Komeito Project Teams (PT) on the SDF Dispatch Law, Komeito rebuffed a proposal by LDP PT Chairman Taku Yamasaki to complete an outline of a law by the end of the current Diet session. Komeito's earlier decision to enter into discussions with the LDP on the law, he assessed, was based on fear of being left out of a Grand Coalition between the LDP and Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). With no prospect for such a coalition, and public opinion increasingly soured by a series of MOD-related scandals, Komeito is in no mood to help the LDP pass ambitious new security legislation before the next general election.

Package Deal

¶4. (S/NF) With talks on the SDF Dispatch Law at an impasse and Special Measures Legislation for Afghanistan and Iraq set to expire next January and July, respectively, the government is quietly crafting a new strategy. Mori said that the starting premise is a shift in focus from Iraq to

Afghanistan. There is absolutely no interest in either the LDP or Komeito to risk a showdown with the DPJ over the unpopular Iraq Special Measures Law. If the coalition were to press for an extension before a general election, they would pay for it at the polls. Waiting until after the election is not an option either, since the coalition will inevitably lose its two-thirds majority in the Lower House and thus be unable to overcome a DPJ veto in the Upper House.

¶5. (S/NF) Given these political parameters, the Japanese government's focus is not on whether to terminate the Iraq mission, but how and when. Mori said that these decisions are largely driven by the U.S. political calendar. The Japanese government wants to end the Iraq C-130 operation before the new administration takes office. This is both to avoid a negative start to relations with the next President and because Tokyo anticipates that there will be a gap in key politically-appointed positions until the summer of 2009. Tokyo wants to characterize the withdrawal as reflecting the mission's success, and hopes for tacit U.S. cooperation in this effort. It cannot coordinate such a strategy unless Assistant- and Deputy Assistant Secretary-level officials are in place. Mori noted that the United Nations will bring its airlift capability in Iraq on line in July, providing a convenient cover to remove Japan's air support. Mori said that Japan will extend the Basic Plan for the Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) mission in July for one year, but intends to terminate the operation in December.

¶6. (S/NF) In order to balance the termination of the Iraq mission, Mori said that the government is seeking to expand its contributions to OEF beyond the refueling operation in the Indian Ocean. Mori stated that Tokyo is on a tight timeline to come up with a new plan, noting that the government intends to convene an Extraordinary Diet Session in August to allow for the Lower House to pass a new Special Measures Law in October and override (after the required 60 days) an expected Upper House veto in December. Complicating this already tight schedule is the need to prepare the Prime Minister to engage with President Bush on the margins of the G-8 Summit in July. Mori added that Tokyo is seeking to keep its planning secret from the DPJ, which would accuse the government of kowtowing to the U.S., Komeito, which would balk at not being consulted, and the LDP, which has senior figures still committed to pressing for a new Permanent Dispatch Law rather than renewed Special Measures legislation. A leak could impact on the government's

planning in unpredictable and very negative ways, he concluded.

New Afghan Operations: Three Options

¶7. (S/NF) Mori confirmed that Japan is intent on continuing the refueling operation in the Indian Ocean in addition to one or more new operations in support of coalition efforts in Afghanistan. The mid-level team that Tokyo is dispatching to NATO and Central Asia is tasked with looking at three different missions: 1) a C-130 support operation based out of Kuwait, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, or Tajikistan; 2) participation in a PRT; 3) deployment of CH-47 heavy lift helicopters. Mori stated that Tokyo intends for any new mission to begin in early spring of 2009.

¶8. (S/NF) Turning to the menu of new missions, Mori stated "frankly" that in the current fragile political environment, Japan will only likely be able to support the C-130 operation "plus sending a couple of SDF doctors and nurses to a PRT." Mori urged the U.S. not to have "unrealistic" expectations over prospects for the CH-47 dispatch. Mori stated, and

neither his MOD nor Cabinet Office colleagues disagreed, that the only reason the CH-47 option was included on the list was to mollify the Ground Self-Defense Forces (GSDF), which objected to reviewing only maritime and air contributions.

¶9. (S/NF) Mori asserted that the CH-47 mission has by far the highest political risks of the three options, especially if there were casualties. Tokyo's ability to stay the course in the face of combat deaths would depend on the stability of the government at the time, he continued. The Koizumi administration would no doubt have easily weathered criticism had Japanese forces been killed or injured. A weak Fukuda Cabinet would have a much tougher time, Mori assessed. The Fukuda government could probably survive the downing of a C-130, since the public has already calculated that risk over the course of the ASDF mission in Iraq. If a CH-47 were to be shot down, however, the DPJ would be able to assert that Japanese died because of a mission that would be widely seen as initiated in response to U.S. pressure.

¶10. (S/NF) Turning to PRT participation, Mori said that Japan has no current plans to engage with other coalition partners working on the ground in Afghanistan. When pressed on potential civ-mil cooperation in areas like de-mining, public health, or crop substitution, Mori responded that it may be difficult to convince civilian aid workers to operate outside of Kabul. Mori categorically ruled out police training inside of Afghanistan by the National Police Agency (NPA), although he said that Japan could train a limited number of Afghan police personnel in Japan (Comment: Mori did not state clearly whether NPA had been consulted on the matter. However, the Embassy was informed on May 21 by MOFA U.S.-Japan Security Treaty Division Director Hirokazu Suzuki that MOFA planned to solicit NPA views. Suzuki later referred follow-up questions on the subject to Mori. End Comment.) In response to suggestions from Emboffs, Mori and his Cabinet and MOD counterparts agreed to consider missions beyond what is currently envisioned, particularly in terms of possible PRT activities.

Comment

¶11. (S/NF) Despite the disclaimer about his personal lack of authority to speak on the matter, Mori made clear he wished that the substance of his message get wide distribution within the U.S. government. Mori acknowledged that a Japanese decision to terminate the Iraq mission would provoke a strong, high-level, and very negative response from the United States. Nevertheless, he was categorical that Japan's political leadership is committed to this course of action and that the U.S. government will be informed formally at the July Summit, if not sooner. Mori and his colleagues did

leave open the possibility of expanding the scope of Japan's potential contributions to Afghanistan beyond its current menu of options. In this context, it may be useful to expose the Japanese survey team to the civ-mil work being done in PRTs by coalition partners in addition to providing briefs on U.S. and NATO operational requirements.
SCHIEFFER

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End Cable Text